

Tor House
26304 Ocean View Avenue
Carmel
Monterey County
California

HABS No. CA-138

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27-CARM,
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOR HOUSE

HABS No. CA-138

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Location: 26304 Ocean View Avenue, Carmel, Monterey County,
California 93921.

Present Owner
and Occupant: Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation, P.O. Box 1887,
Carmel, CA 93921 and the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea,
Carmel, CA. A portion of the premises is subject to a
life estate held by Donnan Call and Lee Jeffers.

Significance: Tor House was the home of the significant 20th-century
American poet, Robinson Jeffers (1889-1962). The
buildings were constructed between 1919 and 1962, with
much of the masonry work being done by Jeffers. The
buildings have remained virtually unchanged since his
death.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The original (west) cottage was constructed in 1919. In the 1920s, a garage (later converted to a kitchen) and the Hawk Tower were built. The dining room, connecting wing, east wing and brick garage were added subsequently, the compound reaching its present dimensions in 1963.
2. Architect: None. Designed by Robinson Jeffers and built by him and his sons.
3. Alterations and additions: Over a period of forty years, a number of alterations and additions were made. The original kitchen was converted to a library when the garage was converted to a kitchen. After construction of the west cottage in 1919, a dining room, a wing connecting the east and west wings and a brick garage were added. The Hawk Tower was built in the 1920s.
4. Historic Events and Personages: The primary associative significance of Tor House is as the home of the important 20th-century American poet, Robinson Jeffers.

B. Sources of Information:

1. National Register of Historic Places, listed October 10, 1975.
2. Interviews with Donnan and Lee Jeffers.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Reminiscent of stone farm cottages in Ireland, Tor House is a composition of buildings of varying heights constructed of granite boulders and brick. The house is a rambling series of connected one-and two-story granite structures and a single, independent granite tower enclosed on the west and south by a granite wall.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good. The kitchen, dining room and west cottage require minor roof repairs and the wood fence requires repair or replacement.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Hawk Tower is three stories, the west cottage one-and-one-half stories and the east wing two stories. The dining room, kitchen, connecting wing, entrance hall and brick garage are one-story structures.
2. Foundations: None, as such. A continuation of the granite walls.
3. Wall construction: All walls are of granite boulder construction, except the west wall of the entrance hall facing onto the enclosed courtyard and the easternmost garage, which are brick.
4. Chimneys: The various wings of the house have six chimneys, four of granite and two of brick, as fireplaces are the primary source of heat for Tor House. A granite chimney is located at the southeast corner of the Hawk Tower. The granite chimney of the west cottage is a central chimney. The granite dining room chimney is located at the northeast corner of the room. The brick kitchen chimney is located at the south end of the east wall of the kitchen. The granite chimney of the connecting wing is located centrally on the north wall. The east wing includes a granite chimney at the northwest corner of the wing and a brick chimney on the east wall of the wing. All chimneys are without decoration.
5. Porches, stoops and projections:

Hawk Tower: The west wall includes second-story granite oriel window broken by vertical three-light casement windows on the north, west and south. The east wall includes a one-story granite extension with a shed roof, located between a pair of granite buttresses extending from the east wall.

East Wing: The south facade of the wing includes a two-story projecting granite bay window, a full bay in width. Extending south from the easternmost bay of the south wall is a two-story granite wing with a garage and second-story bedroom. At the ground level of the northwest corner of the wing, a narrow arched passage connects the main courtyard and the enclosed courtyard.

Other: Tor House includes three small projecting granite wood storage sheds: one on the east kitchen wall within the enclosed courtyard; one at the northwest intersection of the exterior walls of the west cottage and the dining room and one at the northwest intersection of the dining room and kitchen exterior walls.

A wooden porch reached by a flight of six steps extends from the north (rear) wall of the back kitchen.

6. Openings:

- a. Doors and doorways: Exterior doors throughout Tor House are unembellished solid wooden doors enclosed by simple wood mouldings.

Doors in the south facade of the connecting wing are a set of six French doors glazed with four vertical pairs of lights. Those of the south facade of the kitchen are a pair of French doors, flanked by a pair of full-length windows.

The doors exiting from the south and west facades of the dining room are of three vertical boards with four lights in the upper panel.

The door to the second story of the Hawk Tower is wood with glazed panels in its upper portion.

- b. Windows: Windows throughout Tor House are of the casement type in a variety of sizes and shapes. The notable exception is a rectangular plate glass window on the wall of the dining room, facing towards Carmel Bay.

7. Roofs:

- a. Shape, covering: Roofs throughout Tor House are covered by wood shingles. The roof of the west cottage is a clipped gable, ridge running east to west. Roofs of the dining room and kitchen are gabled, running north to south. The roof of the connecting wing/entrance hall is a shed roof and that of the brick garage is a gabled roof, running north to south.

The east wing roof is a gabled roof, running east to west, with intersecting hipped roofs on the north facade, covering the bay and garage extensions.

The roof of the Hawk Tower is stone, serving as the floor of the open third level.

C. Description of Interior:

1. West cottage: Interior surfaces of both rooms of this wing are vertical redwood boards trimmed with redwood battens. Flooring throughout is redwood and the ceilings of both rooms are exposed redwood joists supporting the second-story floor.

The north wall of the living room, a common wall with the north bedroom, contains a large central fireplace with a common flue with the bedroom fireplace. The stone living room fireplace is surrounded by a simple redwood molding. At the east end of the north living room wall, stairs ascend to the bedrooms in the loft. Balusters supporting the stair railing are simple square redwood posts.

A built-in redwood bench extends along the west wall of the living room and continues one bay along the south wall of the room.

2. Dining room: The walls of the dining room are exposed granite with the exception of the central portion or the east wall, which is wood panelled with narrow vertical redwood boards. The ceiling is exposed rafters supporting the shingled roof. The south quarter of the room contains a redwood gallery, overlooking the room, reached by a ladder through a trap door. Beneath the gallery is a built-in china closet/buffet of unpainted redwood with painted inscriptions on the doors. A large stone fireplace occupies the northeast corner of the room.

The wall surfaces of the dining room contain numerous artifacts, cemented into wall surfaces. These include:

- a. Two carved sandstone acanthus leaves, which come from a church in Santa Barbara destroyed by an earthquake, located at the southeast corner of the east wall,
 - b. Seven pre-Columbian terracotta busts from Central America, with an obsidian sacrificial dagger near the door to the kitchen, on the east wall,
 - c. A carved stone Aztec mask to the east of the fireplace together with a carved human torso from India,
 - d. A white stone from the great pyramid of Cheops in the apex of the north dining room wall, and
 - e. A stone inscribed "Hardy 1-11-28," placed to the right of the door on the west wall by Jeffers on the death of author Thomas Hardy.
3. Hawk Tower: The first floor consists of two rooms: a principal room and a smaller room within the shed-roofed east addition reached through a narrow door. Interior first-floor wall surfaces are granite, with the exception of the west wall of the principal room. The walls of this room are broken by a large window on the south facade and a small casement window on the west facade. The shed addition includes small windows on the south, east and west. The principal room has a small granite fireplace in the southeast corner. The floor is stone.

Suspended above the south window is a wooden hanging bookshelf. Along the west facade is a wooden bench with cabinets with carved doors below. Above the bench is a bookshelf and, above that, a pair of wooden cabinets, the carved doors of which depict a hawk and a loon. In the northwest corner of the room, a hidden staircase ascends to the second story. The ceiling is mahogany, also being the floor for the second story room. The second story may be reached internally by the hidden staircase or externally by a flight of granite steps.

The second-story room consists of two parts: a mahogany-panelled main room and an exposed granite oriel window on the west. The principal room is panelled in vertical mahogany boards trimmed with mahogany battens. A pair of panels in the northwest corner open to the hidden staircase. The ceiling and floor are mahogany.

The south wall is pierced by three evenly-spaced Gothic lancet windows. A small granite fireplace is located in the southeast corner. The wall is panelled above the fireplace and includes a glass-doored cabinet.

The east wall is pierced by a panelled Gothic lancet window, duplicating those on the south facade. The west wall is broken by a narrow passage into the oriel window. Flanking the arched entry to the window are two hawks carved into the mahogany panelling. Within the oriel are three small casement windows.

D. Site:

Stone walls and a low wooden fence are linked to the outer walls of structures to form an enclosed compound. A stone wall encloses the southwest and west end of the main courtyard, extending from the tower on the east 24 feet to the west, where it intersects with a north-south wall extending from the west wing of the house to the south. This wall is broken at midpoint by a wooden gate. The granite walls are in excellent condition; the gate is in fair condition. A wooden fence extends east from the tower 37'-6" where it intersects with the wooden fence extending south from the east wing of the house. A gate is located near the east wing entering the outer courtyard. The fence is split posts suspended on a 2 x 4 frame on the courtyard side of the fence. The remaining exterior walls of the compound are exterior buildings walls.

Entering the east gate, an outer courtyard consists of lawn to the south and a small rose garden in front of the east wing. The rose garden is enclosed by a low granite wall. A walk of brick, glazed tile and billiard table slate extends west to the main courtyard.

The main courtyard is entered from the east through a low granite wall extending from the west end of the east wing to the south to its intersection with a similar wall extending to the east from the northeast corner of the tower. A low brick wall extends west from the courtyard entrance, connecting with the tower and forming a small garden at the southeast of the main courtyard. It is complemented by a garden to the north of the courtyard entrance, extending to the buildings to the north. The center of the courtyard is paved in brick with a brick walk extending to the entrance to the west wing and a brick walk to the dining room and kitchen. To the west wing and to the east there is another small garden containing a pair of Irish yews.

The west end of the courtyard is primarily lawn with a sundial in the southwest corner. Adjacent to the south facade of the west wing is a small garden, in which the graves of two of Robinson Jeffers' favored bulldogs are located.

A third courtyard is enclosed by the kitchen, connecting wing and east wing. It is paved in brick with a small garden adjacent to the north wall of the east wing.

The property extends west from the courtyard wall to Scenic Road, sloping to the west substantially. This area currently is overgrown and has been used to dump grass and garden cuttings in the past. West of the plate-glass dining room window are several large granite boulders protruding from the ground. These are the boulders (tor) from which Tor House derives its name.

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